

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 /053 W

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O R 291614Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6031

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE: DEVOLUTION, ELECTION

. OF PARTY LEADER AND NEC ELECTIONS

REF: (A) LONDON 15271, (B) LONDON 15448

SUMMARY: SECOND DAY OF CONFERENCE SAW DELEGATES ENDORS-
ING GOVERNMENT'S DEVOLUTION POLICY OVERWHELMINGLY AFTER
ADMINISTERING CRUSHING DEFEAT OF ANTI-DEVOLUTION RESO-
LUTION CALLING FOR REFERENDUM. IN CLOSED AFTERNOON
SESSION, CONFERENCE APPROVED RESOLUTION INSTRUCTING

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NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (NEC) TO SET UP A WORKING
PARTY TO DEVELOP REVISED PROCEDURES FOR ELECTING PARTY

LEADER AND TO REPORT TO NEXT YEAR'S CONFERENCE. NEC HAD SUPPORTED THIS RESOLUTION. RESULTS OF NEC ELECTIONS INCREASING LEFT-WING REPRESENTATION ON THAT BODY BY ONE WERE ALSO ANNOUNCED. IT WAS A MIXED DAY FOR THE GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. ANTI-DEVOLUTIONISTS, AS ANTICIPATED REF A, MOUNTED MAJOR EFFORT TO STOP OR AT LEAST DELAY GOVERNMENT'S PLANS TO MOVE FORWARD WITH DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT IN SCOTLAND AND WALES. CONFERENCE WAS ONCE AGAIN FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN TWO COMPOSITE RESOLUTIONS, THE FORMER TAKING A HARD-LINE ANTI-DEVOLUTION POSITION AND CALLING FOR REFERENDUM IN SCOTLAND BEFORE PROCEEDING FURTHER. THE SECOND WELCOMED THE WHITE PAPER PROPOSALS, URGED THEIR ENACTMENT IN 1977 AND REJECTED ANY DELAYING TACTICS SUCH AS REFERENDUM. WELSH MP NEIL KINNOCK SPEARHEADED ATTACK ON WHITE PAPER IN STRONG, PASSIONATE SPEECH WHICH FOUND CONSIDERABLE FAVOR AMONG CONSTITUENCY PARTY DELEGATES. NEC (AND GOVERNMENT) POSITION WAS ARTICULATED BY LEADER OF THE HOUSE MICHAEL FOOT WHO REBUTTED OPPOSITION ARGUMENTS AND REAFFIRMED GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO ENACT DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION IN NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT. WHILE FOOT REJECTED ANY REFERENDUM BEFORE PASSAGE OF LEGISLATION, HE INDICATED GOVERNMENT WOULD BE WILLING TO DISCUSS POSSIBILITY OF A REFERENDUM WHICH WOULD NOT DELAY OR BLOCK ENACTMENT IF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE REVEALED STRONG SENTIMENT FOR SUCH A TEST. THE RESOLUTION OPPOSING DEVOLUTION WAS CRUSHED BY 4.7 MILLION TO 800 THOUSAND IN A CARD VOTE, FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATION OF NEC. THE PRO-DEVOLUTION STATEMENT WAS THEN OVERWHELMINGLY ENDORSED. CONFERENCE ALSO APPROVED CHAPTER 11 OF LABOR'S PROGRAM 1976 WHICH OUTLINES THE GOVERNMENT'S DEVOLUTION OBJECTIVES IN SCOTLAND AND WALES.

2. MEETING IN CLOSED SESSION, CONFERENCE ALSO APPROVED A COMPOSITE RESOLUTION CALLING FOR REFORM OF THE PROCEDURES USED TO ELECT THE PARTY LEADER (HE IS CURRENTLY SELECTED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY VOTING BY SECRET BALLOT). IT "INSTRUCTS" THE NEC TO SET UP A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SPECIAL WORKING GROUP TO "CONSIDER APPROPRIATE MEANS OF WIDENING THE ELECTORATE INVOLVED IN THE CHOICE OF A LEADER" AND TO REPORT BACK TO NEXT YEAR'S CONFERENCE. DETAILS OF THE DEBATE WERE NOT AVAILABLE BUT THE NEC RECOMMENDED ITS APPROVAL, AND THE CONFERENCE COMPLIED.

3. RESULTS OF THE NEC ELECTIONS WERE ALSO ANNOUNCED, AND DID LITTLE TO CHEER CALLAGHAN OR LABOR PARTY MODERATES. LEFT-WINGER NORMAN ATKINSON BEGGED INDUSTRY SECRETARY ERIC VARLEY OUT BY 3.5 TO 2.7 MILLION VOTES,

REPLACING CALLAGHAN AS TREASURER. THERE WERE NONCHANGES
CN OME TRADENUNION, CONSTITUENCY PARTY OR WOMEN'S
DIVISIONS, AS MODERATE JACK ASHLEY ONCE AGAIN FINISHED
EIGHTH IN A RACE FOR SEVEN SEATS AND EDUCATION UNDER
SECRETARY MARGARET JACKSON FELL FAR SHORT OF THE VOTES
NEEDED TO DISPLACE JOAN MAYNARD. MODERATE JOHN
CARTWRIGHT (AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS) WAS REELECTED
AFTER A ONE YEAR ABSENCE, BUT HIS WIN DID NOTHING TO
REDRESS THE NEC BALANCE. THIS OUTCOME SHIFTS THE NEC'S

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ACTION EUR-12

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CENTER OF GRAVITY FURTHER LEFT BY ONE SEAT.

4. PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN'S ADDRESS TO CONFERENCE
ALREADY REPORTED IN REF B.

5. COMMENT: FROM THE GOVERNMENT'S STANDPOINT, IT WAS
ANOTHER DAY OF MIXED RESULTS. THE DEVOLUTION ISSUE
CAME OUT AS EXPECTED, BUT ITS EFFECT ON THE PARLIAMEN-
TARY OUTLOOK, WHERE THE FUTURE OF SCOTLAND AND WALES
WILL BE DETERMINED, IS EXPECTED TO BE MARGINAL. AND
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ORGANIZATIONS, ESPECIALLY IN ENGLAND, WILL CONTINUE TO
OPPOSE DEVOLUTION. OBVIOUSLY, ATKINSON'S ELECTION TO
THE NEC DOES NOT AUGUR WELL FOR THE CLOSER GOVERNMENT/
NEC COOPERATION DESIRED BY CALLAGHAN. IN POLITICAL
TERMS, THE NEC ELECTIONS PROBABLY REPRESENT THE GOVERN-
MENT'S MOST SERIOUS SETBACK, EVEN THOUGH THE OPTIMISM
OF EARLIER THIS YEAR THAT MODERATES WOULD BE ABLE TO
REDRESS THE IDEOLOGICAL BALANCE HAD PRETTY MUCH
EVAPORATED BY THE BEGINNING OF CONFERENCE. CAUTION,
HOWEVER, SHOULD BE EXERCISED IN ATTRIBUTING TOO MUCH
IDEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE TO ATKINSON'S ELECTION, SINCE
THE "BUGGIN'S TURN" ETHIC IS ALWAYS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR
IN THESE ELECTIONS, AND HE HAS BEEN RUNNING FOR THE JOB
FOR SEVEN YEARS. SOURCE ON NEC TOLD EMBOFF THAT NEC-
APPOINTED WORKING GROUP WOULD NOT RECOMMEND CHANGES
IN LEADERSHIP ELECTION PROCEDURES AND THAT APPROVAL OF
THIS RESOLUTION WILL HAVE NO OPERATIVE SIGNIFICANCE.
WHILE HE IS NO DOUBT CORRECT, WE NOTE THAT TONY BENN
IS A MEMBER OF THE NEC AND HAS PUBLICLY INDICATED HIS
DESIRE TO SEE PARTY LEADER SELECTED BY CONFERENCE.
SHOULD HE PLAY A ROLE IN THE WORKING GROUP, ITS REPORT
MIGHT TURN OUT DIFFERENTLY THAN IS EXPECTED.

ARMSTRONG

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